
Housing Committee

HB 1921

Brief Description: Providing assistance to homeless individuals and families.

Sponsors: Representatives Springer, Pettigrew, Santos, Walsh, Appleton, McDonald, Kenney, Darneille, Hasegawa and Ormsby.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Transitional Housing Operating and Rent (THOR) program within the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (DCTED).
- Appropriates \$15,000,000 for the 2007-2009 biennium for the THOR program.

Hearing Date: 2/7/07

Staff: Robyn Dupuis (786-7166).

Background:

THOR Overview

The Transitional Housing Operating and Rent (THOR) program has operated within the DCTED since 1999, however it is not a program currently in statute. The program is the result of a decision of the Washington State Supreme Court mandating that the DCTED and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) create a Homeless Families with Children Plan and provide services to assist homeless children and their families. In 1999 the legislature included a budget proviso of \$5,000,000 for the 1999 -2001 biennium to fund the program that became known as THOR, as well as several other initiatives to help homeless families with children. The THOR funding has remained consistent at \$5,000,000 a biennium since 1999.

THOR Activities

Under the THOR program, the DCTED distributes funds to counties based upon the homeless funding formula used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The counties and their service providers choose a "lead agency" which may provide THOR services itself and may also subcontract with other service providers in the area to provide services. Only families

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with children and with a family income at or below 50 percent of the area median income are eligible to receive THOR services. Services include rental assistance, operating subsidies for transitional housing facilities and case management. The DCTED has established limits for the percentage of funding that can be used for each activity as follows:

- Up to 50 percent may be used for operating subsidies for transitional housing facilities.
- Up to 100 percent may be used for rental expenses (including rental vouchers, utilities and moving expenses).
- Up to 40 percent may be used for case management services.

THOR Results

THOR client data is reported to the DCTED twice a year and a follow-up survey is conducted with past program participants at 6 and 18 months following their exit from the program. In 2006, 1,358 families received THOR services and 471 exited the program. Of those exiting, 74 percent achieved permanent housing and of those families, 49 percent obtained unsubsidized housing. It is estimated that the THOR program is meeting approximately 19 percent of the need of families with children for transitional housing assistance and services.

Although the DSHS/DCTED Homeless Families with Children Plan is not required after January, 2007, the DCTED intends to continue operating the THOR program and will report on its achievements in the State's Homeless Housing Strategic Plan.

Summary of Bill:

Transitional Housing Operating and Rent Program Overview

The Transitional Housing Operating and Rent (THOR) program is created within the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (DCTED). The purpose of the program is to assist homeless individuals and families secure and retain safe, decent and affordable housing.

The DCTED will provide grants to eligible organizations to operate the program. Grantee organizations may use the funds to provide:

- Rental assistance, including security deposits and moving expenses.
- Case management services designed to help the client move toward self-sufficiency;
- Operating expense subsidies for transitional housing facilities that serve homeless families with children.
- Administrative costs of the grantee organizations.

The DCTED is authorized to develop requirements, procedures and guidelines for the program as needed.

Eligible THOR Program Participants

- Families with children who have household incomes at or below 50 percent of the area median income who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.
- Individuals or families without children who have incomes at or below 30 percent of the area median income who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

THOR Reporting Requirements

- Data on all program participants must be entered and tracked through the Homeless Management Information System.

- Grantee organizations are encouraged to apply to the Washington State Quality Award program.
- The DCTED will include an annual THOR report, including specific performance measures, in the State Homeless Housing Strategic Plan.

THOR Program Funding

- \$15,000,000 for the 2007-2009 biennium is appropriated from the General Fund to a new THOR account. Of these funds:
- The first \$5,000,000 must be used for rental assistance, case management, operating subsidies, and administrative costs to serve families with children.
- The remaining funds may be used for rental assistance, case management and administrative costs to serve all eligible program participants.

Appropriation: \$15,000,000 for the 2007 - 2009 biennium.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 30, 2007.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.